Ottawa not ruling out hike on carbon price; Canada must fulfil pledge to global community, says environment minister

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Body

On the heels of a global climate summit that was widely panned as a disappointment, Canada's environment minister says the country must still do what is necessary to meet its own emissions targets - including possibly ramping up the national carbon price.

In a phone interview Monday, Jonathan Wilkinson said Canada needs to fulfil its promises to the international community, even as major emitters like the United States drop out of the collective effort to restrain global warming below catastrophic levels this century.

The "most efficient way" to do that, Wilkinson said, is through carbon pricing.

"It's definitely one of the mechanisms that we need to look at in order for Canada to meet its targets," Wilkinson told the Star when asked about instructions from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to look at "strengthening existing" measures to fight climate change.

"And let's be clear, Canada needs to achieve its targets," Wilkinson said. "If we want to be relevant to the conversation that's going on in the international community, if we want to be part of actually addressing this fundamentally important issue for our kids and our grand kids, we need to meet our targets. We need to do what we say we're going to do."

Canada's current emissions target under the Paris Agreement is 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. While Wilkinson acknowledged Canada is projected to fall short of that target, the Liberals are still promising to "exceed" it and effectively eliminate annual emissions by 2050.

To do that, Wilkinson said the government needs to pursue new initiatives like planting two billion trees over the next decade, as well as unspecified "additional work" that is being identified as one of his "highest priorities" for 2020.

This will include a review of the federal government's national minimum carbon price, which mandates that all provinces and territories have a levy on greenhouse gas emissions that is set to climb to $50 per tonne in 2022.

No decision has been made for the price beyond that year, but Wilkinson suggested an increase is possible as the government prepares to pass a law that will set "legally binding" five-year plans to reduce emissions.

Wilkinson spoke after returning from Madrid, where he attended this year's United Nations climate conference with a delegation of government officials and MPs. The annual summit is part of the process that created the Paris

Agreement in 2015, as the international community grapples with what scientists say is a shrinking window to enact unprecedented changes and avoid the worst extremes of climate change.

Posting on social media this weekend after the summit, UN Secretary General Antonio Gutteres said he was "disappointed" with this year's summit.

Catherine Abreu, executive director of Climate Action Network Canada, said the lack of renewed action from the meetings "betrays the millions of people around the world calling for real climate action," while Green MP Elizabeth May deemed it a "phenomenal failure to meet the demands of science, the peoples of the world and particularly the children of the school strike movement."

As reported in the New York Times, the U.S. was among the countries that blocked a non-binding motion calling on countries to adopt more aggressive emissions targets - a key expectation that Canada is committed to meet for the 2020 summit in Glasgow.

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